

## A Man of Few Words

by Beiowulf

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## A Man of Few Words

It only took a few words to get Tadashi to come running.

For instance, 'I'm lonely', sent at 10:47 on a Monday night from someone who never texted him first.

He looked at the words for a while, checking the sender once or twice. He'd been half asleep - his phone on vibrate on the bedside table; only the light of the screen had caught his attention, displaying the message that he would later learn wasn't ever supposed to be sent.

'I'm lonely'

Luckily the train ran till midnight.

'I'll be right over,' he sent back hesitantly, his thumbs hitting the keys slowly. The electronic passed on the message with a pleasant rumble and dimmed, stashed in the pocket of pair of gym short that were hastily pulled on. Tadashi made his way through his house with adrenaline in his veins fighting against the soundlessness of the rooms. His parents were asleep, their door propped open, and he tiptoed past it, fearful of how they would react to his nighttime endeavor. Flinging on a jacket over his thin t-shirt he slid open the front door, turning around to close it cautiously behind him. His phone buzzed. He didn't look at it.

The station was a few blocks away - five in fact - and before this year it had never been a distance Tadshi had dreamed of being able to run, full tilt, without falling to the ground in an asthmatic heap at

the end. He'd grown stronger lately, increasing his stamina, and fighting against the burning in his lungs. He was tired of being left behind. When he reached the platform he was the only one boarding the train, which almost left without him, sliding through the rusty doors at the last second.

His phone buzzed again. He sighed and reached for it.

'misstype, sorry'

And then another

'don't come'

Tadashi felt his chest constrict. This was why he hadn't dared to check earlier. If those words had reflected in his eyes while he was leaving the house, or running to the station, he would have stopped in his tracks, apprehension raising its head. He doesn't want you to come. He doesn't want you to come. You're annoying him. Like always, you're overstepping your bounds and he's going to be angry-but it didn't matter at this point, with the train hurtling down the tracks. He couldn't turn around if he tried. The stop he needed was only two away from his own; he might as well go all the way. Tadashi tugged at the collar of his jacket, feeling slightly hot, and grabbed onto an overhead handle. He couldn't sit down. He might not get back up.

There were no words coming to mind of what to type back; he slipped the electronic back into his pocket. Tadashi tried to get the churning in his stomach to subside as he swayed this way and that under the movement of the compartment. It wasn't the first time he had done something impulsive - on top of that it had almost always been for this same sort of reason - but on each and every occasion he felt near death, in a way. Like his skin couldn't hold in the doom he kept building with his mind, irrationally, or so he thought.

Outside of the train it had started to rain, beginning with a few drops here and there but then evolving into a steady rhythm of water that soaked Tadashi only a few paces into the second half of his journey. He was more unfamiliar with this part of town; the streetlamps were darker and more spaced out and the roads were harder to navigate at night. Tadashi shivered, reading a sign with squinted eyes and running off in what he hoped was the right direction.

'I think I'm lost. Midoriko rd?' He slowed his pace, breathing heavily through his mouth and tapping his left heel to rid himself of nervous energy.

The reply came a few minutes later. 'fine. stay there.' Tadashi stayed, sheltering under a tree and wiping water droplets off of the touchscreen. The sound of rainfall was hypnotic in its continuum, joining eventually with the sound of heavy footsteps from far away, pausing intermittently before starting up again faster and closer. Suddenly Tadashi's head was protected by a dome of vinyl. Through dripping bangs he glanced up to meet the tired golden eyes of Tsukishima Kei, which darted away quickly.

"Sorry, Tsuki," Tadashi whispered reflexively. Tsukishima scowled weakly and jerked his chin back in the direction he had come from.

At the entrance to the Tsukishima household - which turned out to be only a street over - the taller blond boy came to a halt. A dim light shone from the living room window and Tsuki gave it a long look before collapsing the umbrella and opening the front door. "Go to the shower and dry yourself off," he ordered. "Akiteru came in late and crashed on the couch so try to be quiet." Tadashi scurried away obediently, hurrying up the stairs to the bathroom reserved for guests. A fresh smell greeted him and he stripped off his wet clothing down to his boxers, grabbing a towel and wiping the rain off his back and out of his hair. A soft knock warned of the doors opening, just a crack, and a fresh shirt with sweatpants was slid through. They hung off Tadashi's thin frame, like most clothes tended to do, and he had to roll the waistband of the pants up three times. They were soft though. They smelled like Tsuki.

In his room, said male was positioned on the very edge of his bed, stiff and looking at the ground. He glanced up once when Tadashi entered, thanking him quietly for the lent clothes, but he soon returned to his statuesque position, even as Tadashi settled himself on the floor by his feet.

Tadashi didn't come to the Tsukishima household very often, and when he did he didn't stay long. It was almost always to meet Tsuki to walk to school together or because his mom had invited him over for dinner. He had never been here at night. Tapping his index finger on his knee and trying to think of how to broach the topic of the message he received, he jumped as Tsuki suddenly spoke, his voice flat. "You can stay in my brother's room tonight. It's the next door down if you don't remember." Tadashi stared at his friend's profile. Tsuki wasn't ever emotional in the least - he said that type of person exhausted him - but this was beyond his usually apathy. He was completely curtailed off.

"Tsuki-" Tadashi began.

"Just go to sleep, Yamaguchi," Tsuki interrupted coldly. "I told you, there was no reason for you to come here. You're being annoying," he grimaced. Tadashi bit back an apology. He was scared of Tsuki, just a little, or intimidated rather; he always had been. It was one of the things that had drawn Tadashi to him - that strange sort of confidence that came from not caring. But he couldn't let it get to him now. Something told him that if he didn't try to talk to Tsuki now he would never be able to again. That if he didn't struggle through that cold distance he put between himself and the world, it would condense into a cocoon that would separate them forever.

Leaving Tsuki. Alone.

"Tsuki," he said again, more firmly. Silence followed. "Tsuki, I-" He pushed himself off the ground and sat next to him, a few inches away. The blond's head whipped over, eyes wide and teeth slightly bared like a feral cat. "Sorry-" No. "Just," he took a breath. "Why did you send that?"

The conflict in his eyes was evident; he was so close to saying he hadn't - it was a mistake, an errant message - his mouth even opened a few times. The frustration showed in his face, coloring his cheeks. Eventually he looked away again. "You wouldn't get it." Tadashi's

hands clenched in his lap.

"Tell me. We don't know that yet." Was this really his voice? It was so sturdy, even if somewhat quiet. Tsuki made a sound of annoyance. Tadashi sighed. "What's wrong?"

"You. Won't. Get it."

"I want to."

"No." Tsuki hissed the word through gritted teeth. A million things flashed through his expression - probably more than the self-isolated boy could ever say in his life, even if he wanted to. Tadashi could see them there, and knew that Tsukishima would never be able to put them into phrases. He was too awkward. He was too shy. And he was too lonely to ever let anyone see that.

"Tsuki-" Tadashi flinched and felt his eyes widen as Tsukishima turn and a hand came up to catch his face. He couldn't remember a time Tsuki had touched him on purpose before. Maybe a high-five after a match, but they didn't really have that type of friendship. Now, as Tsuki's thumb caressed his cheekbone, skimming across where all those cursed freckles were, and came to a stop on his lips, Tadashi felt his heart give a little jolt. His lips parted slightly and sent out a gust of hot breath onto Tsuki's hand. The blond tensed, his already chaotic eyes growing dark. "Tsuki..."

The hand angled his face up as Tsukishima came down and Tadashi could taste the fear and the bottled up emotion as their lips met; he could feel how Tsuki was trembling ever so slightly, certain that in a few seconds he'd be pushed away and oh Tadashi thought, oh is that it. But before he had the chance to respond Tsuki pulled away and Tadashi missed the warmth on his lips immediately. So he pushed them back together, guiding the hand that had fallen to his shoulder back up to grasp his jaw, and locked his own fingers into Tsukishima's shirt. Tsukishima had been saying something, but he wasn't anymore as teeth clashed together in what was both their first kiss, lips wet and sliding.

Tsukishima leaned back and Tadashi wound up in his lap, grabbing onto broad shoulders to keep himself from falling down before softly pecking Tsuki once more on the mouth, then the nose, then on each eye as he took off his glasses. And there, in those eyes, was the awkwardness and the loneliness and the care that Tadashi had sensed, because no one could be that empty - maybe just scared, as he had been way back then when they first met. So carefully, carefully, as to not hurt his pride, Tadashi put his forehead to Tsuki's and breathed, searching around to link their hands together. Tsuki's palms felt clammy and cold.

"You can tell me," and his voice shook, because despite his conviction he was still Yamaguchi Tadashi, and strength of spirit was not one of his virtues. So when Tsuki's hands untangled from his and came to grasp at his shoulders he felt his stomach drop because maybe he'd been mistaken, but Tsuki didn't push him away. He held onto him tight, as if to make sure he was real, and his dazed golden eyes took up all of Tadashi's vision.

"When I'm with you...I don't feel lonely. Do you get it?" Tadashi nodded and gave a small sound of agreement as he eased himself onto

the bed beside Tsuki. Cautiously he reached out a hand, inviting Tsuki to come down as well. Hands intertwined he did, adjusting the smaller boy so that he fit under his chin and against his chest.

After a moment of silence Tadashi asked "Do I really have to sleep in your brother's room?" He didn't expect the shakiness in Tsuki's voice as he responded, 'no'. Nuzzling his face into the other's shirt Tadashi soothed him. "Alright, I'll be here." He searched around for his hand and found it, not coated in a cold cocoon of distance.

"It's okay. I get it."

End  
file.